

Reviews



DOES THE BIBLE JUSTIFY VIOLENCE?

by John Collins. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. Pp. 56. \$6.00 (paper).

Does the Bible Justify Violence? is an edited version of the author's article in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003), "The Zeal of Phineas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," and it had also been previously presented as the presidential address at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting held in Toronto, Canada, in 2002. John Collins is Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale University.

The five chapters between the introduction and selected bibliography are as follows: "The 'Ban,'" "History and Ideology," "Story Example," "Eschatological Vengeance," and "Violence and Hermeneutics."

In the first chapter, drawing on the books of Torah, Collins claims that the violence associated with the worship of YHWH in antiquity is most vividly illustrated by the "ban" (Hebrew: *herem*), the practice whereby the defeated enemy was devoted to destruction (5). Furthermore, he summarizes two factors taken as warrants for violence. First, any people who might interfere with Israelites' monotheism, worshiping YHWH alone, may be exterminated. Second, the divine land grant legitimized their killing of the indigenous inhabitants in their promised land. Next, in "History and Ideology," Collins contends that the massive slaughtering of the Canaanites is not supported by any archaeological evidence. Therefore, he submits that the books that are engaged in the construction of the identity of Israel reflect not Israel as it was but Israel as the authors thought it should be (15). In chapter three, using stories from the apocrypha and in Christian history (Mattathias and his sons, the Crusaders and abo-

litionists), Collins illustrates how people made use of biblical texts to justify violent actions. In chapter four, suggesting that the expectations of eschatological vengeance shape group identity, Collins implies that cosmic dualism is the root of religious violence in the Jewish and Christian traditions. In the last chapter, "Violence and Hermeneutics," Collins laments that the problem of violence and religion is not peculiar to Islam but also found in attitudes and assumptions that are deeply embedded in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures (28) and concludes with the following sentence:

Perhaps the most constructive thing a biblical critic can do toward lessening the contribution of the Bible to violence in the world is to show that such certitude is an illusion. (33)

Does the Bible justify violence? The answer is yes and no. Yes, it does, because undeniably violence and wars were recorded in the Bible and many of them were waged in the name of God. No, it doesn't, because of the questionable nature of the accuracy and validity of the violence contained in the Bible as discussed in this book. The rationale is that one cannot depend on "fantasies" to justify violence. Consequently, a short answer to this solemn question would suggest that when a political leader rushes to war in the name of God or rationalizes with scriptural justification, the question of why that leader is so certain must be asked.

This is another engaging Fortress Facets series booklet dealing with a centuries-old issue that will surface whenever violence or war is justified by the Bible or declared in the name of God. The discussion presented is without doubt thought provoking and demands our serious research, review, and reflection.

Finally, there is one argument in the

book with which I struggle, namely, the suggestion in chapter two that the violence in the Old Testament is only constructed ideology, not historical event. I have the following questions in my mind as a response: Can we be absolutely certain of the theory that the violence in the Old Testament is merely constructed stories, relying on recognized archaeological data? Isn't this, in some sense, also a captivity of certitude based on our insufficient research, incomplete information, and inadequate knowledge of the biblical world? Have archaeological excavation sites in Israel been exhausted? If yes, are there any archaeological digs going on in the Holy Land at this time? If not, what makes us so certain that in the future there will never be any new archaeological materials to sustain the events recorded in both the Jewish and the Christian scriptures?

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THE GIFT OF GRACE: THE FUTURE OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY, edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters, and Peter Widmann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. Pp. xvi + 368. \$30.00 (paper).

"What is the state of Lutheran theology at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and where do we go from here?" (xi). Originally presented at a conference in Aarhus, Denmark, in January 2003, on the future of Lutheran theology built upon the dual categories of *charism* and *context*, this collection of essays attempts to develop a consistent program for theologians in and outside the Reformation tradition to offer to the church catholic in this new era (xii). In order to understand exactly what program for the future of Lutheran theology is being advanced by the editors of this volume, it is helpful to identify what is meant by *charism* and *context*.

By *charism*, the editors mean "entrusted gifts that continue to inspire" (xii). Justification by faith alone has been held by many

as the hub around which Lutheran theology and proclamation turns; yet this volume wants to argue for a wider array of themes central to the Reformation's theology and practice. So, while one of the book's sections has essays related to the doctrine of justification, it is surrounded by other themes to be equally engaged, suggesting perhaps that justification is not *the* central Reformation doctrine, but it is also not at present the most significant one when lined up among others! Readers will find essays organized under eight different themes within Lutheran theology: grace (part I), cross (part II), justification (part III), justice (part IV), comparisons (part V), ecumenics (part VI), world (part VII), and science (part VIII).

In the next century, the editors tell us, Lutheran theology must attend to these charisms within the *contexts* we find ourselves in (xii). This volume models this in several essays that are devoted to asking whether it is appropriate for certain "charisms" to be carried on into the new era of Lutheran theology. For instance, South African theologian Fidon Mwombeki writes an essay titled "The Theology of the Cross: Does It Make Sense to Africans?" The context to which many of the essays in this volume are tuned is "cultural pluralism" (xii). Whenever pluralism is responded to, the options boil down to two: either to articulate Christianity with its exclusive truth claims or to make Christianity inclusive (where the truth claims of the Christian faith are one truth among many other viable options). By choosing and arranging particular essays the way they have, the editors of the volume have opted against the former toward the latter position. In other words, the editors have sought to do theology through Enlightenment lenses, asking and attempting to answer the question of what possible relevance Lutheran theology might have in a new age. It is the question of the old Adam and Eve turned in upon themselves that drives the enterprise, the question asked of Jesus by the Gerasene demoniac: "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" (Mark 5:7b).

Pluralism becomes the foil against which many of these essays seek a new articulation, because it is basically understood by the editors of the volume that Martin Luther was a contextual theologian who was responding to theological questions that arose out of the church and society of his time. Since we are several centuries removed from Luther and the milieu that presented Luther with the questions he wrestled with, we need not hold on to how he went about answering these questions, because these questions are not our own. We need to find creative ways of responding to pluralism. Hidden in this sort of argumentation is a not so subtle attempt to move the “hub” of Lutheran theology away from justification by faith alone towards other presently relevant doctrines that might address the issues raised by pluralism. What the editors do not understand is that at the core of any way Lutherans might respond to pluralism is the justification of the ungodly.

Keeping the above criticisms in view, there are indeed certain essays within this volume that rise above the cry of relevance, and understand instead that at its core the work of (good) Lutheran theology is to properly discern law from gospel, leading one fully out of speculative matters into proclamation itself. To this end, the reader will want to read all of the essays, asking whether or not each theologian has taken the core work of Lutheran theology seriously; several in this volume have done so, splendidly. As will be readily seen by those who carefully read these essays, however, this work is not always done or at least not done with the same degree of rigor.

At its core, this volume seeks to respond to “cultural pluralism” through a theological pluralism that is argued to be what Lutheran theology is all about in this new era. This is, in fact, what happens to Lutheran theology when the “hub” of justification by faith alone is removed and it’s every doctrine for itself, run amok, rooted and connected to nothing other than that to which it seeks to respond. When this happens, Lutheran theology loses its unique theocen-

trism, opting instead for an anthropocentrism. While this volume is interesting from that perspective, it is not, as a whole, to be understood as representative of the future—or present—of a radical Lutheran theology that has at its “hub” justification by faith alone.

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DO NO HARM: SOCIAL SIN AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY, by Stephen G. Ray Jr. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. Pp. 164. \$17.00 (paper).

From sexuality to welfare reform, just war to stem cell debates, the multitude of social issues facing our communities, church, and world are demanding critical theological and moral deliberation. So also, the wide variety of responses to social issues tenuously poses the threat of marginalizing and suppressing persons or groups representing the minority voice. With any such discourse, great care and caution is needed, not only in our theological and ethical reflection, but also, and often more importantly, in the patterns of language we utilize. Inevitably, Christian reflection on social issues involves conversation about sin. “Sintalk” permeates the plethora of topics that threaten the unity of the church today.

As the title implies, this book encourages theologians to assume a Hippocratic oath, of sorts. It draws attention to the systematic and material consequences of inattentive discourse concerning sin by critically examining how well-intentioned social statements have unwittingly perpetuated the ills they attempt to address. This suggests the need for a keen awareness of the social economies at work in our environments, and the ways we are unknowingly drawn into such economies. The author, Stephen G. Ray Jr., an associate professor of theology and philosophy at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, demonstrates how such irresponsible theological discourse has unintentionally excluded and marginalized groups by handing over divine sanction for

oppression. To shed light on the elusiveness of such error, he examines specific instances in the works of Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He shows how both, while well-intentioned, make use of popular categorical statements that consequentially reproduce the very sins they attempt to critique, and open the door for morally responsible oppression.

The first chapter gives an overview of the problems sin-talk can create when little attention is paid to the ways one's social and discursive contexts influence the categorical statements one chooses to use. Ray presents what he believes are the two primary sets of problematic tendencies in sin-talk: first, the rhetorical construction of marginalized groups by means of social characterizations of irresponsibility (irresponsibility/marginalization); second, the essentialization and legitimacy of marginalization by means of "defilement" language (defilement/essentialization). He fleshes out each of these pairings using public examples—welfare reform and homosexuality—in which sin-talk has been used without adequate attention to the social implications of the language used.

Chapter two explores how Niebuhr's critique of the marginalization of the African-American community unknowingly exemplifies Ray's irresponsibility/marginalization model of problematic discourse. Niebuhr fails to recognize that his analysis of the oppressive system makes use of characterizations tainted by the dominant culture's view of the African-American community. Thereby, he reinforces the system he seeks to critique. The theological anthropology he constructs is based on stereotypical claims that co-opt sin-talk with dominant and oppressive economies. Inadvertently, Niebuhr creates a concomitant doctrine of sin that not only relies on cultural depictions of the minority community as irresponsible, but also further encourages the marginalization of the African-American community.

The third chapter explores Dietrich Bonhoeffer's response to the Third Reich's "Restoration of the Professional Civil Serv-

ice" legislation, the Nazi document that contained the Aryan clauses. Ray uses Bonhoeffer's work to exemplify his second model of problematic sin-talk, the defilement/essentialization model. He argues that Bonhoeffer's response may have successfully challenged the political and social issues presented, but unsuccessfully criticized the operative cultural and theological beliefs—beliefs that essentialized the regenerative project of the Nazi regime. By not emerging from dominant economies—not discounting the presence of a "Jewish problem"—Bonhoeffer failed to fully grasp his own immersion in dehumanizing social economies. Ray argues that Bonhoeffer's limited response inadvertently encouraged the popular identification of *the Jew* as defilement to Aryan purity and, thus, fed the essentiality of their extermination.

The fourth chapter asks if it is possible for Protestants to engage sin in the social dimension theologically without being co-opted by discourse of privilege. Though Ray recognizes Protestant history does possess a propensity toward dominant powers, he advocates a retrieval of Augustine's doctrine of sin. The careful application of this doctrine as found in Calvin and Luther can counter such problematic tendencies. Key to Ray's argument is Augustine's understanding of both our *participation* in sin and the *pervasiveness* of sin. The general human condition of sin is universal—all humanity *participates* in sin. All stand before God as equally sinful, thus placing all humanity on a level playing field and making ontological distinctions, hierarchies, or qualitative differences unjustified. The *pervasiveness* of sin within the individual humbles all who believe they are insulated from socially conditioned economies. Ray closes by considering several rules for engagement that resist irresponsible sin-talk.

This book provides a wonderful introduction to the doctrine of sin and its often uncritical use in popular culture. However, take caution not to view Ray's critique of Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer as a full condemnation of their contributions to Christian theology. Though I believe he hastily un-

derestimates the depth of Bonhoeffer's awareness, Ray's review of these two scholars points out the pervasiveness of the dominant culture's effects on theological discourse. Ray opens our eyes to the potential consequences of our participation in irresponsible sin-talk and effectively lays out a powerful argument that is long overdue. This book will engage not only pastors, theologians, and students, but is accessible to laity as well. It provides an excellent starting point for critical, responsible Christian conversation around the sensitive issues that face our communities, church, and world today.

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**THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS SEEN:
ART, FAITH, AND THE CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY**, by Robin M. Jensen.
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. xi +
152. \$16.00 (paper).

One of the perduring skirmishes in the worship wars is the presence and use of art in the church. Many people, not knowing much about art but knowing what they like, argue for what they deem familiar images and resist art that stretches their comfort zone. Others, of a more experimental frame of mind, claim to like what they know and insist on images that stretch beyond the comfortable and familiar. Many opinions and persuasions rise and collide between these poles, with varying degrees of confidence and confusion about the role and place that art plays in the life and worship of the church. Robin Jensen acknowledges and addresses these and other issues in her fine book, which is tellingly subtitled *Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*.

In six succinct chapters, originally delivered as a series of public lectures, Jensen offers a balanced and nuanced argument with the intention of getting people to think about the wondrous yet nettlesome role the arts have played throughout the church's history. She knows her history but wears it

lightly, for this is not a history book. At the outset she declares that her intention is "to discuss the many problems that the mutual engagement of the church and the arts has encountered over the centuries and to suggest some ways that lay persons as well as theologians might overcome that difficult legacy" (x).

To make good on her intention Jensen stakes out the territory without getting too technical in her discourse. Recognizing that many people regard art in the church as an "extra" that might take attention and funds away from more pressing needs, she proceeds to talk about the value of a sustained encounter with art as spiritual formation. It's a nice move. In a chapter that addresses the issue of visual art and spiritual formation she considers the formative power of the beautiful; and in a conversational manner she evokes the witness of such figures as Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, and even Paul Tillich.

In that discussion she recognizes that beauty demands attention and effort because beauty is not necessarily prettiness or loveliness. It can sometimes be, like the cross, challenging, even terrifying. Beauty, thus perceived, can press us beyond safe and familiar places to newer and surprising areas. "As we challenge ourselves to become ever more experienced and sensitive observers, we can find the beauty in these unexpected places, like children whose tastes must develop so that they might enjoy the sharp or the sour as well as the sweet" (10).

In a world where images come at us in rapid succession, Jensen asks that we learn to slow down and think about what we see. Our horizons will become broader and our perceptions deeper if we really think about, study, reflect, and—most crucially—learn to look. This is good advice for pastors, worship leaders, novices, lovers and patrons of the arts. But it is admittedly an uphill task, especially when we are exposed to thousands of images a day and when even museum goers spend on average only three to ten seconds looking at a work of art.

Invoking images that range from the figure of Jonah and the signs of a Pilgrim Hat

on the Massachusetts Turnpike, Jensen urges the reader to develop a visual exegesis. She affirms that Christians believe in the existence of some kind of eternal and transcendent truth. But she goes on to make a strong claim about how we can glimpse that truth in graphic art. "I would argue that such glimpses come as often through the experience of looking at art as through the reading or hearing of a story or a sermon or a Sunday school lesson, which are all art forms that bring the 'Word' to life for the attentive audience" (48). That declaration alone should provoke lively conversation among preachers, Christian educators, and anyone who has sat watching and waiting for a sermon to take shape.

Each of the essays in Jensen's book contains rich material for discussion, as when she talks about idols and icons, holy places and sacred spaces, the beautiful and the disturbing. Much of her argument is apposite, though some of it could benefit from amplification. For instance, Jensen makes a compelling case for regarding art in the church as decoration, as didactic, as devotional, and as prophetic. She makes an especially strong case for the latter mode. Yet some might want to advance the possibility that art can also be inspirational, comforting, even (dare it be said) entertaining. It might prove instructive to see where these avenues of inquiry lead.

The book has some technical shortcomings. It contains neither an index nor a bibliography, so it is difficult to find subjects or follow up on them. Moreover, the quality of reproduction in some of the illustrations is not altogether satisfactory. The discussion of Jonah and his image, for example, is confusing, for it is difficult to read the small and blurry image as presented (28). Jensen's Pilgrim Hat image (30, 31, 33) is delightful, though it might have been more so if she was of an age to have traveled on the Massachusetts Turnpike in the days when all the signs contained an Indian arrow skewering the hat. The discussion and argument that led to subsequent changes in the image speak to the issues of sign, symbol, cultural awareness, and the power of artistic rendering.

In addition to her discussion of the decorative and didactic, Jensen's final essay on the beautiful and the disturbing is most provocative, something that could greatly enrich conversation about art in the church and in the larger society. Periodically the use of artistic images (and the funding for them) bubbles over into the public square. Certain art like Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* or Edwina Sandys's *Christa* (pictured on page 148) provokes (and even offends) many observers. The issues these expressions raise are echoed in other heated discussions, like the banning of Harry Potter books, the appropriateness of films (like Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*), and the arguments about funding Public Broadcasting.

While not all of these issues are discussed in Jensen's final essay, she provides a thoughtful framework for all things considered. Because art of all sorts (graphic art, architecture, music, even preaching) is essential insight into and interpretation of truth, it behooves thinking Christians to engage in those matters of interpretation. "This is the work of the interpreter: to engage the Word through the arts, whether preacher, teacher, artist, or poet. And this work is essential to shape and sustain a living community of faith" (151).

To this end, one is tempted to make a modest proposal. When considering the use, placement, and commissioning of art for the church, responsible church folk should be obliged to enroll in a course in the history and interpretation of art. At the same time, creative artists should likewise take a course of church history and theology. Such mutual study and conversation could prove to be clarifying, even salutary. Failing the realization of such a proposal, however, one could still recommend that the various interpreters of truth read and discuss Jensen's book for the sake of art, faith, and the Christian community.

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PREACHING PAUL, by Brad R. Braxton.
Nashville: Abingdon, 2004. Pp. 192.
\$18.00 (paper).

Brad Braxton is Associate Professor of Homiletics and New Testament at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. More than that, Braxton is an ordained Baptist minister and bearer of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In *Preaching Paul*, he combines the rigor of academic study alongside his prayerful pastoral sensibilities to create a work that is most worthy of shelf space in the libraries of ministers, preachers, theologians, and teachers, lay or otherwise. Through his direct, readily accessible writing style, Braxton is able to usher his readers into the profundity of the theological, homiletical, and biblical issues in the Pauline letters in ways that challenge and inspire.

After briefly laying out the overarching structure of the book in his introduction, the “what” and “how” of preaching Paul, Braxton deems it necessary to take what he calls “a twenty-second time-out” to address the “why” question. Namely, why ought we preach from Paul? Braxton is responding to his experience that “many ministers assume Paul is difficult to understand, overly opinionated, and supportive of, if not directly responsible for, various kinds of oppression in the church” (14). As a consequence, preachers often avoid preaching from Pauline texts. During this “time-out,” Braxton, perhaps serving in the role of an inspirational coach, provides three substantial reasons (a pep talk?) as to why Paul must be preached: (1) Paul’s ministry and letters were cross-cultural and created “multiethnic communities that worshiped Christ” (15); (2) Paul was committed to the formation of the community, for the life of Christian witness is lived out in community (16); and (3) Paul’s use of ethical exhortations given to these cross-cultural communities living in Christ is of great importance. That is, “Paul stressed the link between behavior and belief” (17). For Braxton, these three messages are essential to the heart of the gospel and find traction in today’s context in which the gospel is proclaimed.

While asserting the necessity of preaching from Pauline texts, Braxton is willing to critique and confront some of Paul's positions on certain issues, specifically, issues of slavery, patriarchy, and sexuality. Under the rubric of biblical authority and accountability, Braxton recognizes our relationship to scripture to be dynamic. He writes,

As I—and the communities to which I belong—interpret the Bible, I will respect its history, and I want the Bible to respect my history. Likewise, I acknowledge the real possibility that interaction with the Bible might positively alter my future. However, the Bible must acknowledge the real possibility that my interaction with it might positively alter its future. (23)

Braxton admits that such a bold statement concerning biblical interpretation may appear heretical to some, but he rightly asks us to consider the following question: "Is it not possible that God also expects us to hold the Bible accountable—accountable to being, through our interpretations of it, an ever more genuine witness to the gospel?" (23). Such willingness to seriously engage the Bible relationally both testifies to Braxton's deep faith in the living word of God and gives life and breath to his work.

After the "time-out" has expired, Braxton frames his discussion around four points derived from his title, *Preaching Paul*. First, he spends a significant amount of time defining the task of preaching in the opening chapter entitled, "What Is Preaching? God's News We Can Use." Braxton states, "*Preaching is the faithful, passionate reporting of God's useful news*" (27). Faithful preaching, as espoused by Braxton, is a "cross-shaped" preaching rooted in the theology of the cross whereby "the saving dimensions of the cross are located in its life-altering *revelations* and not its gory details" (29). Two such revelations are offered by Braxton: a theology of the cross both "reveals a mistake of equating appearances with reality" (29), e.g., powerlessness with the cross, and "reveals God's involvement in politics" (31). In naming the theology of the cross as the criterion of faithful preaching, Braxton claims the cross of Christ as the

lens by which we see God's transforming power in the world. Such a claim is one of the great strengths of this book; however, his discussion of the theology of the cross also leaves the reader in want. Braxton fails to mention Martin Luther's seminal contribution to Paul's cross-shaped theology. In doing so, he neglects to name this theology's antithesis rampant in our world—the theology of glory. Adding an in-depth theological and exegetical excursus on the theology of cross would only strengthen Braxton's commitment to faithful preaching.

Where chapter one centers on preaching, chapter two, "Who Was Paul? Paul's Convictions and Communities," focuses on Paul. In this chapter, Braxton asks readers to put aside their assumptions about Paul and encourages us to reassess him as a historical person rooted in historical time and place. Through solid biblical interpretation and exegetical work, Braxton shows that Paul, through his belief in the resurrection, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and faithful church planting, "attempted to create a cohesiveness that would keep his congregations together until Christ's return" (68).

Chapter three, "Preaching Paul: Paul as a Messenger of the Gospel," identifies the book's title—*Preaching Paul*—as ambiguous, so that "the word *preaching* is a 'verbal adjective' describing Paul, and Paul is the subject" (9). The task of this chapter is to investigate Paul's own preaching in a way that gives rise to a new word for today. Braxton relies on the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* (sacred reading) to enlist the Holy Spirit's guidance in hearing Paul's preaching in order to "discern how God might speak to us now in ways beyond what Paul might have intended" (72). Such practice takes time, effort, and energy that are all too often consumed by the demands of parish life. Here, Braxton offers his wisdom born from experience to help preachers create the space for such devotional sermonic preparation. If one read this chapter alone, it would be well worth the effort!

Chapters four and five, "Preaching Paul: Interpreting Paul's Letters for Proclamation," and "Preaching Paul: Proclaiming

the News from Paul's Letters," respectively, employ the word "preaching" as a "verbal noun" specifying an action done to Paul who is now and 'object'" (10). In other words, in these two chapters Braxton offers suggestions concerning how one might preach Paul. Chapter four proposes a step-by-step comprehensive process for sermon preparation using Romans 8:26–30. In chapter five, Braxton provides the sermon that was crafted through the academic work and devotional practices exercised in the previous chapter. He also includes two other sermons on Pauline texts along with solicited written critiques by colleagues, a practice he fully endorses. These chapters serve as a useful window into the mind and heart of a faithful preacher.

Recognizing the limits of his book and the richness of Pauline scholarship, Braxton's final chapter includes a Pauline bibliography as well as an annotated bibliography of twenty influential works on the Apostle Paul—a fine gift to his readers who wish to continue studying Paul for the sake of proclamation. It is Braxton's hope and prayer that, in the end, "this book's investigation of preaching and of Paul will assist God in creating something new in each one of us and, in turn, in our preaching ministries" (23). By the grace of God, it does exactly that.

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CHURCHES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE: REACHING YOUR COMMUNITY WITH GOOD NEWS AND GOOD WORKS, by Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. Pp. 334. \$19.99 (paper).

A significant challenge faced the church throughout the past century and still continues today—how to develop pastoral leaders and congregations that are able to integrate both evangelism and social action into their ministries. This book argues that, unfortunately, the modernist and funda-

mentalist split at the beginning of the twentieth century led many denominations and their congregations to take separate paths in relation to these two themes. To this day, congregations that stress evangelism tend not to be as involved in social concerns, and congregations that stress social action tend not to be as involved in evangelism.

In light of the new emphasis during the past decade on faith-based initiatives (FBOs), the authors intend that this book serve as a stimulus for congregations that stress only one dimension to add the other as well. They take the position that congregations do not need to settle for a dichotomy between these two emphases. Further, they believe that there is a historical "window of opportunity" for congregations to regain a voice in helping to shape public policy through developing holistic ministries (13). Ron Sider is the best known of these authors, and he brings a wealth of credentials to this subject. He is joined by two others who also have strong backgrounds in holistic ministry. Their collective intent is to offer an alternative view to the commonly accepted perspective that congregations need to engage in either evangelism or social action, but not both. They believe that congregations can be passionate about and effective in doing both.

Their methodology is to work from the ground up. Using four extended case studies, they develop a research-based argument that seeks to demonstrate that congregations can, in fact, bring word and deed commitments into a synergistic ministry, what they label as "holistic ministry." The opening section of the book provides an overview that offers sixteen characteristics of holistic ministry, within four categories, in an attempt to make the concept operational (15–19). The four categories are: (a) having a holistic understanding of the church's mission; (b) developing dynamic spirituality; (c) fostering healthy congregational dynamics; and (d) maintaining holistic ministry practices.

Part I of their book, entitled "Understanding Holistic Ministry," sets up the key aspects of the authors' argument. Founda-

tional to this argument is that, while both evangelism and social involvement can be developed within the same congregation, there is no one template for achieving this. This is clearly demonstrated in their case studies. Holistic ministries are profoundly contextual, and require courageous leadership in their development. They ground their biblical argument for this view in the life and ministry of Jesus. But they also provide a theological argument by recasting the traditional categories of systematic theology through the lens of the interplay of evangelism and social action. Evangelism in a holistic ministry always involves social action, and social action always involves bearing witness to the gospel. But more importantly, they argue that both must grow out of a deep spirituality of communal life that is nurtured through worship, sacrament, fellowship, and discipleship.

Part II of the book, entitled "The Essential Elements of Holistic Ministry," takes a look at the infrastructure that is required for such congregations to be both faithful and effective. Interestingly, their points follow many of the same principles that one finds in the church-effectiveness literature, but here the emphasis is on supporting a holistic ministry that is committed to both evangelism and social action. Critical analysis is placed on the type of leadership that is required for such ministry, and the necessary organizational structure that is required to support it. Probably the most unique contribution of this section of the book is their emphasis on the necessity of developing, nurturing, and supporting partnerships with a wide range of church, community, and governmental organizations.

The final section of the book, entitled "Cultivating and Implementing the Vision," also stresses what other Christian and secular literatures stress, which is the absolute necessity of developing a compelling vision for such a ministry. With this emphasis, they also bring into play the necessary discussion regarding how to address the dynamics of change, as well as the reality of conflict.

While I found this book to be quite engaging in presenting its argument, there are

several matters that give rise to concern. First, the book seems to vacillate a bit on whether it is intended to be primarily a research-based study or an inspirational exhortation. To accomplish the former, there would need to be more substantive research beyond the cases that are cited and used. To accomplish the latter, there would need to be tighter writing and fewer pages. Redundancy in the argument as well as the length of the book tended to make it somewhat tedious to read from cover to cover.

Second, while the authors provide some biblical and theological foundations for their argument, this material is probably insufficient to make the case to persons on either side of the historic divide between evangelism and social action. The book tends to rely more heavily on experience and example than on biblical and theological foundations to make its case for the value of holistic ministry. But a thoroughgoing biblical and theological argument would probably require another volume.

Third, it is not clear to me who the intended audience is supposed to be. Trying to write a book that can bridge the divide between evangelicals, who place more stress on evangelism, and ecumenicals, who tend to place more stress on social action, is difficult, to say the least. While the intent of their argument is clear, and the case is fairly well made, I am not sure that the resulting book will be all that convincing to these two somewhat different types of church traditions. I suspect that evangelicals might find the argument for including an emphasis on social action within their evangelism to be more convincing than ecumenicals will find the notion of bringing evangelism into their social concerns. Overall, I would rate this as a helpful book that offers a constructive approach to thinking through the issues of developing a holistic ministry within the life of congregations. But, this is worth noting, since few congregations have been able to achieve such over the past hundred years or so.

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